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C O N F I D E N T I A L YAOUNDE 000732

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TREASURY PLEASE PASS TO DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SAEED
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DEPT ALSO FOR AF/C AND EB
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA ACTION OFFICERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2017

TAGS: KCOR EFIN PREL CM PINR

SUBJECT: CAMEROON: USG SHOULD AVOID ASSOCIATION WITH
FINANCE MINISTER POLYCARPE ABAH ABAH

REF: A. YAOUNDE 445
1B. YAOUNDE 402
1C. YAOUNDE 356
1D. YAOUNDE 229
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1F. YAOUNDE 179
1G. YAOUNDE 174
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1I. 06 YAOUNDE 1812
1J. 06 YAOUNDE 1811
1K. 06 YAOUNDE 1522
1L. 06 YAOUNDE 1501
1M. 06 YAOUNDE 1491
1N. 06 YAOUNDE 396

Classified By: Poloff Tad Brown for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) We believe that fundamental USG interests are undermined when USG officials -- and those of other groups of which we are members -- associate publicly with Polycarpe Abah Abah, Cameroon's current Minister of Economy and Finance and undisputed paragon of corruption. Abah Abah is a masterful politician who exploits his interactions with representatives of foreign governments and agencies to counter his abyssmal reputation in Cameroon. In so doing, he also tarnishes the image of his sometimes unwitting interlocutors, and their governments, in the eyes of Cameroonian. In order to advance the fight against corruption and failed governance (paramount USG priorities in Cameroon), we recommend that USG officials (and associations to which the USG is a member) avoid public contact with Abah Abah.

12. (C) The meeting last week of G8 finance ministers in Germany provides an example where presumably well-meaning officials invited Abah Abah to participate in a delegation of African finance ministers. Unfortunately, this invitation -- which was not announced beforehand in Yaounde -- had the perverse effect of bolstering Abah Abah's image in Cameroon while simulatenously giving rise to questions over the effectiveness of G8 pledges to fight corruption and bad governance on the continent. Our German Embassy sources here reluctantly admit this also reflects an unwillingness on the part of their Development Minister to face up the difficult reality here -- or to heed their advice on such topics.

13. (C) Prior to the April World Bank/IMF meetings in Washington, Abah Abah escaped a finding of ineligibility under Presidential Proclamation 7750 (section 212f) for high

level corruption only because the Presidency withdrew his visa application before a finding could be made. We have information indicating that Abah Abah, a lifelong public servant, has a personal fortune in foreign accounts exceeding USD 200 million, and that he continues to embezzle at an alarming rate. Post has copies of at least two audits that directly indict Abah Abah's financial stewardship of millions of dollars in GRC funds during his tenure as the Director of Taxation. We are currently pursuing a number of different allegations of even more lucrative corruption in his time at the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MINEFI). We have received first-hand testimony of journalists who were bribed and threatened by Abah Abah to place favorable stories or censor negative ones. Post will submit an updated Visas Donkey requesting a 212 (f) ineligibility at the soonest appropriate time. In the interim, public appearances with such an individual can do nothing but harm the image and interests of the USG.

¶4. (C) For business that must be conducted with MINEFI, the USG has a palatable Cameroonian interlocutor in Lazare Essimi Menye, Minister Delegate in Charge of the Budget, who spent his career working with international financial institutions in Washington and who is generally perceived to align himself with reformers within the GRC.

¶5. (C) We obviously would prefer not to urge the black-listing of a key member of Cameroon's cabinet, but overarching USG objectives on anti-corruption require that the USG distance itself as much as possible from such extraordinarily unsavory individuals whose corrupt acts have harmed not only their own societies, but also USG interests. We also note that President Biya told the Ambassador in April that he will fire Abah Abah before the election now scheduled for July 22. Even if Biya does not make good on that promise (for tactical or other reasons), we believe that mounting pressure on him to dismiss -- and arrest -- Abah Abah in the expected post-election reshuffle will make it very hard for him to do otherwise. Not doing so at that time would expose Biya's declared war on corruption as a complete sham.

MARQUARDT